

“I’m Looking for a Weimaraner Puppy”

The majority of breeders will agree that the hardest part of responsible breeding is making good placements for the puppies. More than once I’ve heard the sentiment that, “The dogs are easy, it’s the people who put me through the ringer.”

Talk to experienced breeders about placing puppies and it will bring out recollections about both fabulous owners and “war stories” about placements that were disastrous.

How do you spot the good homes and conversely those that should be rejected? I asked that question of several people who I respect as individuals who will carefully screen prospective puppy buyers. Everyone I asked stressed the importance of lengthy conversations about the buyers’ expectations, experience and how they plan to meet the needs of their dog.

The buying public has gotten savvy about what to say to breeders. A common approach is to promise the breeder anything and tell them what they want to hear. My advice is just to keep talking and keep an eye out for “red flags.” It’s easy spot “red flag” indicators when they occur in bunches, but it’s harder when most of the conversation is good but there are one or two things you’re just not sure about. Here are a few that should raise the hair on the back of your neck:

1. The family schedule leaves the puppy alone for hours and hours. Although the buyers are well intentioned, their life is overly crowded with other commitments. There are only 24 hours in a day and puppies need a big chunk of time.
2. The buyer talks repeatedly about breeding. Make sure you’re not enabling a backyard breeder.
3. The puppy won’t live in the house. Don’t all the books warn that, “Weimaraners can’t be relegated to the kennel”?
4. There’s no fenced yard, “...but we walk a lot.” You have to wonder how they feel about walks in pounding rain, sleet/snow, and broiling temperatures, and don’t forget those 2:00AM, “I gotta go out” pleas.
5. The buyer, or members of the family, have health issues that preclude the activity level needed for raising and maintaining an active dog. Beware when there are repeated questions about allergies, strength of the dog, and how much they shed.
6. You suggest obedience training and the response is, “I don’t need training classes, I know how to train my dogs by myself.” Then you have to wonder if the previous dogs were good solid family members or terrors on paws who were banished to the backyard.
7. In conversation there’s a history of other dogs that, “...didn’t work out.”
8. The buyer has very limited money. Let’s face it, to keep a puppy in good condition it takes substantial cash for quality food, veterinary care and general maintenance.
9. This one is sometimes hard to spot. The buyer evidences lack of savvy about animal behavior. There are people who don’t respond to the signals that we, as dog people, take for granted. We’re not looking for Dr. Dolittle “talk to the animals” skill, but enough that the person is cognizant of canine communication.
10. You don’t have good rapport with the person. Placing puppies is not an exercise in making new friendships (that’s an occasional bonus). However, if you’re not comfortable with a person, it limits communication. It’s also an issue of when you can’t put your finger on it but you have a gut reaction that a person is not a good match for your puppy. When in doubt, go with your gut.

The purpose of this column is not to send shudders of guilt about past mistakes. The purpose is to remind us all that placing puppies is one of the hardest parts of breeding dogs. Hopefully, ticking off a few things that have "bitten" other breeders will help to get great homes for our wonderful gray dogs.

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